DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 233 HE 027 199

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TITLE Cooperative Market Research Project.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (12th, Ypsilanti, MI, April 1-3, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration Education; Demonstration Programs; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Institutional Cooperation; *International Programs; International Trade; Marketing; *Merchandising; Program Development; School Business Relationship; Strategic Planning
IDENTIFIERS Austria; *Miami University OH

ABSTRACT

A pilot project was developed in which the Advertising and Market Research Center of the Vienna School of Economics and Business in Austria and the German Department as well as the Marketing Department of Miami University in Ohio are working together to collect market research data and formulate a market entry strategy for Roemerquelle, an Austrian mineral water product targeted for export to the American market. The project's four phases included: (1) the Roemerquelle managers explained their export strategies to Austrian faculty and students in an upper level market research class, and Austrian students developed data collection instruments for implementation in the United States; (2) American students critiqued the questionnaires, negotiated changes with the Austrian students, began to collect data, and translated open-ended responses into German; (3) Austrian students analyzed the questionnaires and published a report of findings; and (4) American and Austrian students will work together on competing intercultural teams to provide recommendations to the host company. (JDD)

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Peter Carels and Lynette McCullough

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EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Twelfth Annual EMU Conference on

Language and Communication for World Business and the Professions

April 1 - 3, 1993

Ypsilanti, Michigan

INTERNATIONALIZING BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

COOPERATIVE MARKET RESEARCH PROJECT

Peter Carels and Lynette McCullough

Educators across all disciplines have long endorsed experiential learning as a necessary supplement (and often, total replacement) for didactic approaches. In the field of marketing education, the need for "hands-on" learning has long been recognized. A perusal of marketing textbooks reveals a variety of opportunities for students to try themselves what they have heard about in lecture: cases, suggested projects, step-by-step guides to create marketing strategies in a variety of hypothetical situations. Many marketing students work with companies as informal consultants or to solve specific problems.

In the area of foreign language education, there has been increased emphasis of late on language proficiency, centering on interactive experiences that involve more or less direct communication. The more authentic the situation, the greater the incentive to perform in a more creditable and convincing manner. As students come to desire more meaningful links between classroom practice and the world of work where they envision themselves someday using their acquired skills, language programs have stepped up their search for settings where this kind of link can take place. As a result, student exchanges, work camps and a variety of internship and summer employment opportunities have been gaining in number.

Beyond the pedagogical benefits, there are many reasons for the popularity of

experiential activities. Certainly the most salient is to prepare students for an increasingly competitive job market. Experiences such as preparing advertising campaigns for actual businesses or working in summer internships give students an edge over the competition and encourage ties between industry and academe which are mutually strengthening. Such practica also develop communication skills, as most require teamwork, formal presentations and written communication. Experiential activities make students appreciate how difficult it is to conduct business "in the real world." They are also forced to integrate material from a number of business areas, e.g., market research, strategy formulation and copywriting.

Experiential learning is important to international business pedagogy as well. Americans are often criticized for their isolationist business mentality and their insistence on conducting export business from home. Educators have a significant opportunity to change these circumstances by exposing students to international environments, cultures and business practices. Currently, efforts to this end are seen particularly in foreign study programs offering traditional classroom learning situations and internships in other countries.

The pilot program described in our presentation has taken a somewhat different approach from the ones we have mentioned, in that it brings together students and faculty from three source groups, one being the Advertising and Market Research Center of the Vienna School of Economics and Business and the other two being the German and Marketing departments of Miami University (Ohio). At the core of the program is a joint project carried out on behalf of Roemerquelle, an Austrian mineral water product targeted for export to the American market. The two-fold objective of this project from the

standpoint of the sponsoring client company has been to collect market research and to formulate a market entry strategy.

The project consists of four phases. The pretest phase began in Austria in Spring, 1992, and the data collection phase followed in Ohio in September-October. The data were analyzed in October-December in Austria. The fourth phase is taking place now through the end of next month, part of it in Austria, where American students will work jointly with Austrian students on combined teams to formulate a proposal for Roemerquelle. Here now is a glimpse into the operations and objectives of each of these phases.

PHASE ONE

The Austrian faculty and students, in the course of an upper level market research class, met with personnel from Roemerquelle to receive the assignment and background information in Spring, 1992. The Roemerquelle managers explained their export strategies, ongoing advertising campaign and reasons for entering the U.S. market. The specific assignment was to assess the viability of this plan and to make recommendations for market entry. The American students were not involved in this phase, however the faculty were kept abreast of developments and problems. We also provided the Austrians with secondary research materials concerning the U.S. bottled water market.

After extensive secondary data collection, the Austrian market research students developed three data collection instruments for implementation in the U.S. The first questionnaire assessed usage and attitudes toward bottled water in general, as well as asking

specific questions about the Roemerquelle label, packaging, advertising and logo. The second questionnaire contained a taste test as well as usage and attitude questions. Both these questionnaires were to be administered as intercepts. The third instrument, a phone survey, assessed usage occasions for beverages and general attitudes about bottled water. All three questionnaires asked about attitudes toward Austria and Austrian products and all three were translated into English.

The Austrian students pretested the three questionnaires in intercept interviews with Americans at the Vienna airport and in foreign study classes in the Vienna area. After making the requisite changes, the questionnaires were sent to the U.S.

PHASE TWO

The pre-tested questionnaires were sent in German and in English to the U.S. teams. The ninety American students were divided into some twenty interdisciplinary teams, typically three marketing students and one business German student per team. A member of the Marketing faculty of the Vienna School of Economics came for a few days to explain the project to the teams, especially in two short presentations and longer question and answer sessions with the Business German students. He also provided background on the company and assignment. Materials were provided in English or German, and the U.S. business German students translated for their teammates, as necessary.

While each of the twenty-four teams was receiving and collecting further secondary data on the U.S. bottled water market, the German students on each team were back-translating

the questionnaires. That gave them pretty good practice in utilizing this somewhat specialized vocabulary. Students critiqued the questionnaires and suggested some minor changes. These were negotiated with the Austrian class. With final agreement, the American teams began to collect data. Each team was responsible for collecting ten complete questionnaires of each of the three types. Data collection for the intercept questionnaires took place in three sites around the Cincinnati area, with random sampling in primarily upscale locations (downtown square on workday, football game, college town on Parents' Day). Phone surveys were conducted from an on-campus phone bank, sampling prefixes from high income areas with random-digit dialing. Each team analyzed the data and provided a topline summary of its findings, based on the thirty questionnaires they had collected. In a second assignment, the marketing students formulated a preliminary market entry and promotional strategy for the Roemerquelle product. Because of other demands in the U.S. marketing course, analysis and strategy formulation was designated as a minor project. In future cooperative efforts of this type, U.S. students will be aggregating the data from all 240 questionnaires from each of the three administrations.

The completed questionnaires were then sent to Austria for tabulation there. Students from the Business German class translated open-ended responses from the questionnaires into German and also explained colloquial expressions and cultural references. For example, the Roemerquelle logo consists of a Roman soldier drinking water from a shallow vessel. Some respondents indicated the logo made them think of the University of Southern California or Michigan State University. Such responses warranted some explanation.

PHASE THREE

In Phase three, Austrian students analyzed the questionnaires and published a final written report, which was provided to Roemerquelle and the U.S. faculty members. In it they summarized the results of their research, but made no recommendations concerning market entry strategies. In future cooperative efforts of this nature, the analysis will be conducted separately by both Austrian and American students. It is important to note that the Austrian market research class focused primarily on the Roemerquelle project, while the U.S. classes were more limited in the incorporation of the project both because of its trial nature and because of the need to cover a range of other topics largely unrelated to the project.

PHASE FOUR

We are currently in the process of initiating Phase four, in which U.S. and Austrian students will be combined on competing intercultural teams to provide recommendations to the host company, based on the primary research collected. Miami participants will serve as valuable informants in interpreting the perceived vagaries of the American market. Only students involved in the initial data collection would ideally be enrolled in this Advertising Strategy Workshop, as this phase is called, however only about half of workshop participants actually took part in Phase two. The rest of the participating students are interested in joining the Roemerquelle project at this later stage and are receiving appropriate materials to bring them up to speed.

The first week of the actual course will take place at Miami University, and the last two weeks in Vienna at the School of Economics. Students are to receive three credits, awarded in German or Marketing.

During the first week of the course, held on the Oxford campus, students will review the initial project and research to date. They will read secondary information and the formal report from the Austrian students, summarizing the primary data collection efforts. The students will critique the work done so far and do further background reading on the U.S. bottled water market. They will also receive cultural background on Austria, Vienna and the University. Materials will be provided in English or German where possible, depending on each individual's ability in the German language. Those who speak little German will receive some basic survival training with reinforcement through peer coaching.

Armed with background information, the students will spend the two weeks in Austria working on teams with the Austrian students at their university, formulating final strategy for Roemerquelle's introduction to the U.S. market. At this point, we estimate there will be six teams, each with four Austrians and one or two Americans. Teams will be designated German- or English-speaking, depending on members' abilities. Faculty from both universities will oversee progress on the project and will offer lectures on related topics such as media planning, copy strategy formulation and legal concerns. A joint visit to the Roemerquelle springs and bottling plant in Burgenland province is also planned. At the end, the competing intercultural teams will present their recommendations to Roemerquelle personnel, probably in English and German. The strategy recommendations will include test

market plans, rollout recommendations, initial media plans, advertising copy strategies and other recommendations including price and distribution. Those receiving German credit will earn it partly on the basis of journal entries and interviews in which the team's progress on the project is recorded and discussed.

As hinted at several points above, aspects of this project were shaped as much by university administrative policy, course requirements and calendar constraints on both sides as by ideal pedagogy. If the summer project is successful however, we plan to organize a similar project again next year with our Viennese counterparts, incorporating it into an international marketing course where it can constitute a greater part of course content. Consecutive business German courses will incorporate various aspects of the on-going project throughout the year. As an additional feature, we expect to have students contacting their Viennese colleagues and corresponding with them via E-mail.

We also plan to include more participating students in all phases of the ongoing project, instead of recruiting from different pools. We shall do this by incorporating the marketing and business German courses into thematic sequences. Under this aspect of the new Miami Plan for Liberal Education, students are required to take a sequence of related courses outside their division of major. If we can induce a number of German students to take the Marketing sequence and a number of marketing students to take the business German sequence, there should be a fair-sized group of students available and primed for the capstone experience of the international workshop in Vienna.